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FROM USMISSION UNESCO PARIS

FOR IO/UNESCO

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SUBJECT: UNESCO: MEETING THE FIRST LADY OF SENEGAL

1. (U) SUMMARY: Ambassador Oliver met with the First Lady of Senegal, Viviane Wade, on March 23 at the request of the Senegalese Delegation. Mrs. Wade requested the meeting in order to explore USG and First Lady Laura Bush's interest in partnering with her to combat disease and promote vaccination in Senegal. Wade inquired whether the First Lady would be interested in helping her to promote health education in Senegal, and Mission advised it would convey her interest to Washington. Wade also asked if the U.S. could share research on sickle cell anemia as Senegal had begun building a research center dedicated to the disease. END SUMMARY.

PROMOTING HEALTH

2. (U) Wade, the Senegalese First Lady since 2000, has been active in UNESCO programs promoting community radio and education in Senegal. She explained that the literacy rate in Senegal is low and worsened by the trend of school dropouts. She stated that images work best in promoting health awareness and disease prevention, and asked if First Lady Laura Bush would be interested in working with her on these challenges. She indicated she would seek a meeting with her later this year. Such initiatives would involve, for example malaria, vaccinations, and sickle cell anemia. She also described government efforts to promote research and training on sickle cell anemia, which she noted targets thousands across West Africa each year. In Senegal, she stated, people hide that they have the disease. Would the U.S. be willing to share its research on this disease with Senegal, she asked, noting legislation on umbilical cord stem cells that President Bush signed into law last December.

3. (U) Ambassador Oliver clarified that the WHO, not UNESCO, has the lead on vaccinations and health in the UN system, but UNESCO does promote health education. The Ambassador suggested a two-track approach, where Wade continued to promote health awareness through images, but also linked her efforts with literacy and education. The creation of culturally sensitive, short and targeted programs for mothers, the Ambassador stated, could help promote family health. On school dropouts, the Ambassador noted the importance of showing families that education provides skills for children that will help improve their lives. She emphasized that the First Lady is interested in helping people live a better life and noted that she would relay Wade's inquiry to her.

4. (U) The Ambassador noted that research on diseases such as sickle cell anemia helps everybody, and indicated that she would relay Wade's request for information on sickle cell anemia research to Washington. The Ambassador also noted UNESCO's basic sciences program, a program that was not yet very strong, but that could still potentially promote these kinds of research partnerships.

5. (U) Wade agreed that linking literacy and education programs with disease prevention would be a good approach and welcomed any interest from the First Lady. She expressed hope that the U.S. and Senegal could share information on sickle cell anemia and expressed gratitude for the Ambassador's willingness to meet her on short notice.
Oliver